

This is the story of Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a lot like you and me.

Nicodemus was a part of the religious establishment and probably a highly respected member of the community. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. The word Pharisee means “the separated one”. His life consisted of separating himself from the general population and obeying the Law to the letter, as much as humanly possible anyway. Nicodemus was educated, he had resources, he knew people... people looked up to him. We are like Nicodemus.

We are also like him in that we are also mysteriously drawn to Jesus. Something in Jesus makes us want to understand him. Nicodemus had a curiosity when it came to Jesus. He was somehow drawn to Jesus. And we are also mysteriously drawn to this man who is called the Messiah.

Everybody is here at this place to worship because of this man called Jesus, son of Joseph.

This mysterious figure of Jesus has an attraction, a draw on our hearts that we can't fully explain. Nicodemus was drawn to Jesus, but he was also confused by Jesus. Nicodemus came to visit Jesus at night.

Some say that he came by night because he was afraid to let other Pharisees know that he was coming to Jesus. Something to take note of is that the Rabbi's of that day said that it was better to study the Law at night, when a person had less distractions. During the day Jesus had lots and lots of people around him a lot of the time. Whether Nicodemus came at night because he was afraid or if he came because he wanted to learn something from Jesus, either way Nicodemus was in the dark.

He didn't understand Jesus. They never quite connected. Nicodemus uses his intellect, his education, the values and morals of his time and his culture and still he missed Jesus' point. Jesus embodied the ways of God that were, by definition, unconventional ways in that time but in our time also.

Jesus' ways were always unconventional. It's difficult for establishment people like us or like Nicodemus to connect (not impossible), but difficult for us to connect with Jesus. Jesus' style of teaching was a “lay it all out there” kind of style. Jesus said, if someone hits you on the right cheek, turn and offer the left to be hit also.

That not a conventional philosophy or way of thought. Jesus had unusual

reactions to violence. The way Jesus responded to violence is not the same way that we respond to violence. It's hard to connect with this Jesus because what he teaches is so different than our logic, our intellect, and our conventional way of thinking.

Jesus was also the one who said: You've heard the saying "love your neighbor and hate your enemy", but I say to you "love your enemy". Friends that is not human cultural logic, is it? Treat your enemy just like they were your friend. Jesus, that's crazy talk... that's just crazy talk. That's tough. That is a difficult teaching and we have a tough time with it.

Several weeks ago in Eva's Sunday School we were talking about these tough teachings. It was so difficult that we had to cover the same lesson for two weeks because these words of Jesus are so tough. After two weeks of the whole class discussing and talking and figuring out what they all mean, we came to the conclusion that some of Jesus' teachings were difficult and hard to understand. Two weeks to affirm what we already knew.

Friends, if you think Jesus' teachings are simple and easy and that anybody could follow them, I would say: "Have you ever read the gospels?"

For the most part, Jesus' teachings are not easy. And in this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus we have yet another hard saying.

Jesus told Nicodemus "you must be born again". Other English translations say "you must be born anew" or some say "you must be born from above."

Now the way I understand it, the original Greek text contains a flexible phrase that has all of these meanings. Whether it's "born again", "born anew" or "born from above" Nicodemus didn't get it. We haven't got it either.

I am sure most of you have been asked more than once in your lifetime "Are you born again?". That implies that being born again is something chosen, something you decide, something that happens by the force of your own will.

My birth had absolutely nothing to do with my decision making. To be reborn means to be born again, then the parallel is birth. The image is about how we came to life. Life is not a decision; it's a gift. It wasn't my decision to be born, nor did I accept birth. Life was a gift, a wonderful gift of grace and love that is mysterious and beyond our finite human

understanding.

I was given this gift of life. It wasn't about decision or will or choice or effort. It's an experience that happens to us, not a thing we choose.

Jesus said it's kind of like the way the wind blows. The wind blows this way and it blows that way and we don't know where it comes from or where it goes. This new birth is an experience that just happens. One day we somehow, mysteriously, just know that we are loved by God eternally.

It's an event, not a choice.

Carl Schenk tells a story about something that happened when he was a young pastor, he tells a story about a day in worship when the wind blew.

It was communion Sunday and this was a small church. People would come forward and take communion and then someone would take that place when it was open. It was a full house that day and a man by the name of Jim happen to be in worship that day. This happened right after the Vietnam war. During that time many congregations were sponsoring the resettlement of the Indo-Chinese refugees.

And Carl's congregation had done just that. Twenty-two Laotians come to live in their community and this congregation had sponsored all of them. Jim had been against it in almost ugly ways. Jim didn't think they belonged in their community. He didn't think the church ought to have brought "those people" to their community.

Jim was sitting on one side of the congregation and the Laotians were sitting on the other side. Both Jim and the Laotians started toward the Lord's Table at the same time. Carl says: I could see what was going to happen and I was on my tiptoes I was so nervous.

You see in this particular congregation they administered the sacrament with each worshiper serving the person next to them. Carl says: I could see it coming. Jim came down one aisle and the Laotian family came down another. Jim and the matriarch of the Laotian family found themselves right next to each other. The bread came down the line and someone offered the bread to Jim, said the customary words "the Body of Christ, broken for you".

Then Jim turned to his left to serve the one beside him. It was none other than the person Jim had tried to keep out of their community. You could

hear a pin drop as everybody got silent and Jim broke off a piece of the loaf and said: "The body of Christ, broken for you."

The wind blew that day. Not everybody heard. Some people were wondering where they were going for lunch after the service was over, others were making grocery lists. Some people were thinking about the ball game.

*But for some, the wind blew that day. It wasn't a choice or an act of will. It wasn't a decision anyone made. It was just a moment when Christ came and people experienced a rebirth.*

*Brother's and Sister's, be alert and pay attention.*

Keep your eyes and ears open because the wind is going to blow one day... if you notice... if you experience it, it will be a new day.

*It will be a new birth from above. I pray that you and I pay attention and that we don't miss it when the wind blows.*

*You think about that, amen.*